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NEA/PPD FOR SULLIVAN, RATNEY AND PELTON

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: PREL KPAO TS  
SUBJECT: TUNISIAN RESPONSE TO THE SECRETARY'S NOVEMBER 2 ADDRESS TO  
THE FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In spite of post's extensive efforts to obtain full coverage for the Secretary's speech at the Forum for the Future in Marrakech, including a pre-arranged interview with one of the media hub spokespersons for a local journalist, the lack of live television coverage on the satellite networks resulted in practically no local media attention to the speech. However, there was extensive coverage of the Secretary's recent statements on the West Bank settlements made before and during the Forum, all of which was negative. As almost no one here had heard the speech, no Tunisians had any comment to make about it. In advance of the speech, the Ambassador flagged the attention of a high-level Ministry of Foreign Affairs official to its importance and also conveyed the significance of the Secretary's new language on the settlements, made at the margins of the Forum, in a diplomatic note.

End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Audience reaction: Neither BBC Arabic, BBC international, CNN, nor Al Jazeera TV carried the speech live or provided coverage of it after the fact. Neither was the speech rebroadcast on local TV afterwards. Consequently, viewership was extremely limited; none of the Tunisians we sought to poll had actually heard it directly, and no one we spoke to had an opinion about it. Most Tunisians were focused instead on statements the Secretary had made about settlements in the West Bank prior to and during the Forum, which had been given heavy and negative coverage in the local papers over the last ten days.

¶3. (SBU) Examples of key headlines/lead stories: As-Sabah Arabic daily: "Clinton's clarifications about settlements are not enough to re-launch the negotiations; Clinton's statement is a step back on Obama's promises." Le Quotidien French language daily: "This spectacular reversal by Washington buries hopes raised in recent months about what appeared to be a shift in U.S. policy." Ash-Shorouq Arabic daily: "America's step-back on settlements has weakened Abbas's options." Front-page coverage in Le Temps: "Even if Clinton tried to reassure the Palestinians in Marrakech, the damage is done and the disappointment is evident. This U-turn means that Obama's intentions will not go beyond the stage of vague attempts."

¶4. (SBU) Key anecdotes of audience and/or government responses: Because of the lack of coverage on the television networks, the Tunisians we sought to poll on the speech were not familiar enough with it to have an opinion.

¶5. (SBU) Overall assessment of penetration and reasons if low penetration: Lack of television coverage meant that few Tunisians were aware of the remarks made in the Forum speech. Those who followed newspaper coverage may have been aware of the Secretary's remarks on West Bank settlements made during a photo spray at the margin of the Forum.

¶6. (SBU) Type of media coverage: Print only, with widespread coverage of Secretary's remarks concerning West Bank settlements,

but not of the speech itself.

¶17. (SBU) Television stations covering the speech live and their viewership: None; probably because no live coverage was provided by the satellite cable news networks viewed by most Tunisians.

¶18. (SBU) Speech (re)broadcast, printed in full or just excerpts: No broadcast or other use of the speech except for the Embassy's web page and our direct emailing to our contacts. Comments were made about Secretary's settlements remarks, but her actual words were not quoted.

¶19. (SBU) Follow-up interviews, statements, events, made by USG officials: On October 30, Ambassador Gray mentioned the fact that the Secretary would be giving an important speech in a meeting with Mrs. Schtioui, the Tunisian Secretary of State for American and Asian Affairs, as she was planning to attend the Forum for the Future. Additionally, the Ambassador sent a diplomatic note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spelling out the language that the Secretary had used in her remarks about settlements made at the margins of the Forum. Tunis Public Affairs Officer subsequently paid an office call on the director of a popular independent FM radio station to ascertain his interest in interviewing an Embassy officer, who had assisted in Marrakech, about the initiatives announced at the Forum; we are hopeful that we may be able to report progress soon but are not overly optimistic.

¶110. (SBU) What key non-USG credible voices commented on the speech, tone, quotes: There was no local commentary on the speech itself, only on the Secretary's remarks about settlements.

¶111. (SBU) What new media tools were used to broadcast the speech or encourage discussion: Post invited a Tunisian journalist from

Al-Sabah newspaper to do an exclusive interview with a PA regional media hub spokesperson by phone after the Secretary's speech at the Forum for the Future, but the hub spokesperson asked to re-schedule this to a later time that was not possible for the journalist. In lieu of the promised interview, we provided the journalist with Washington's media notes about the Forum that had been sent in advance of, and after, the speech. Post posted all of these materials on the Embassy web page, in Facebook, and distributed them electronically to local journalists in a trilingual format.

GRAY